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ABSTRACT

Communication training for people experiencing life changes is examined in this paper. Among the topics considered are: recent social changes that have led to the occurrence of an increasing number of personal and professional changes during people's lives; the increased attention given recently to the process of communication within relationships; basic competencies for communication in interpersonal relationships; the nature of people seeking guidance for dealing with intimate relationships; central characteristics of an intimate relationship; ways the content of communication training for people experiencing life changes can address cognition, emotion, behavior patterns, self-concept, and system concepts; considerations in deciding on the form communication training programs will take; values of using a multi-family approach; and how to prepare couples for change, help them experiment with changes, and provide for the transfer of change to out-of-group settings. (GT)

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NEGOTIATING LIFE CHANGES

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I

The decade from 1960-70 was one of enormous social upheaval and change in the United States. The current decade seems more quiescent. However, although there is less public turmoil, change is occurring at a rapid pace nonetheless. The most recent "movement" is not being carried out through mass demonstrations of political protest. It is being enacted within the confines of millions of American homes. This disturbance of domestic tranquility is creating a quiet revolution of great significance.

The turbulence of the sixties had profound impact on educational institutions. Curricula and approaches to instruction were hastily modified to deal with the heightened political consciousness of students. Now, there is another, more personal, form of consciousness growing that demands a comparable response in our institutions of learning. A new breed of students are seeking to realize a different, but equally crucial, set of ideals in their lives. This paper is intended to aid helpers, teachers, leaders respond appropriately to this emerging need.

There are many ways of defining the forces to which I am referring. Those to be concentrated upon are summarized in the title . The first is the process of personal change. The developmental life stages given extensive attention prior to 1970were those that occurred up to and through adolescence. For a number of reasons, such as the end of the post-war baby boom, rising affluence, the burgeoning of human potential activities,. the emergence of "liberation" movements. more tranquility on the political front, and others, the processes of change throughout adulthood have risen to prominence. Many people, especially those who take advantage of post high school educational opportunities, are now accustomed to and even expect to undergo personal and professional changes during the course of their lives more often and with

greater impact than had ever been true in the past. They also are turning in greater numbers to educational resources, such as non-fiction books, short workshops and institutes, personal counseling services, and college courses, for help in negotiating these changes.

The second element of the revolution we are describing is the impact of these changes on relationships. In the sixties, the interaction most challenged was the one between the individual and society. Currently, the stress is on the contact between individuals and their closest partners in life, their family members, friends, work associates, etc. Just as the earlier turbulence radicalized or alienated the dissatisfied from the governing establishment, the recent restlessness has heightened dissatisfaction and caused turmoil at the level of personal relationships. This has resulted in a spurt of attention and of creative contributions to the fields of marital and family therapy, social interaction (among friends and in encounters among singles), and human relations in business and industry.

Finally, the third major theme of this period is communication. Again, in the sixties, the concerns causing social strife were addressed by increasing access to the "system" by the people who felt ignored by it. Blacks, women, and youth were brought into the governing councils; their dissenting views were heard; and some of their rights were given greater consideration. The conflict between the rebels and the establishment, the we/they tension, was relieved, at least to manageable proportions. Now, a comparable effort is underway seeking ways to relieve tension within the relationships of people experiencing a yearning for change. The means often emphasized is improving communication among them. It is believed that the dissolution of relationships among changers is not inevitable; the breakdowns that have occurred can be reduced; the strains can be minimized if the forces of change can

be foreseen, acknowledged, and discussed between the parties involved. Thus, the needs of an individual for change and for intimate relationships are not necessarily incompatible. The ingredient needed for molding the two is sensitive communication. This paper is intended to define how this ingredient can best be incorporated into the relationship system.

II

Communication is a significant variable in a wide variety of transactions. It affects everything from business to sexual relationships. It is taught to preschoolers and octogenarians. This ubiguity requires that its content and form be examined at two levels - a universal or fundamental one and a particular or specially tailored one. In other words, to design a system for communication training we must keep in mind the skills that applies in all situations and those that are specifically adapted to the unique group of recipients of the training in each instance. These two levels will be addressed here, beginning with the general and proceding to the particular.

The increased attention given recently to the process of communication within relationships has resulted in the development of a number of approaches to its study. In fact, in this time of hunger for solutions to this pervasive problem area, there has been a premium on creativity, on originality, on the appearance of having a unique focus that outdoes all the current competitors for public attention. As a result, many different systems, each promoting a new set of terms or giving prominence to one element of the process over all others, have emerged. This has created much confusion and unnecessary redundancy in the literature. It has spawned a new sub-area of investigation, one that attempts to identify the core communication competencies that seem to underly all programs in this area. This effort seeks to articulate what the skills are that people deemed generally competent in interpersonal oral

communication tend to manifest. These findings provide the basis for a training program aimed at helping people negotiate relationships through change.

My synthesis of this literature incorporates ten basic competencies. Individuals who are optimally prepared to deal with the communication exigencies of all forms of relationships are people who:

a. are genuine, open, unguarded about revealing themselves - who don't leave people guessing as to what they are thinking or feeling in the moment-to-moment "here and now" of their interaction or about their past experiences that are relevant to what is occurring - even those that are not likely to be easily accepted or approved by the other, the "risky" comments.

b. show empathy or understanding of what others think and feel - indicate clearly that they are making an effort to listen attentively to what others are trying to say and to see the situations and reactions as the others see them, to put themselves in their shoes, to comprehend their messages as the others intend to send them and to check out the accuracy of their understanding as they do.

c. give warmth, caring, support to others - extend acceptance of what others think and feel, in the sense of respecting the validity of their viewpoints, acknowledging the worth of their efforts to communicate, affirming their worth as people, showing high regard for their ability to see things and respond to them in a competent way.

d. seem confident and relaxed - interact in a easy, flowing manner, are generally calm and patient in interaction, not tense, hurried, clipped, or abrupt.

e. make appropriate comments to keep conversations going smoothly - rather than leaving long, awkward pauses, interrupting often, or

ignoring others - asking questions to draw others out, relating what they have to say to what others have said, finding contrasts and similarities between viewpoints expressed.

f. are assertive, not dominant or passive - "own" their views, rather than repressing them or pressuring or accusing others to achieve an artificial agreement.

g. word their own ideas clearly and concretely - can express viewpoints in vivid, specific terms so that others can visualize them accurately - aren't vague or abstract, don't resort to "I can't express it," take a clear position and explain it with illustrative examples.

h. deal with feelings, express their own and respond "feelingly" to others' - recognize the role of affective energies in relationships, encourage their arousal and full expression in themselves and others, both affectionate and hostile, both joyful and painful, both what is expected and what is usually less acceptable in a given context.

i. are flexible regarding the people and situations with which they can interact comfortably - can adapt to the norms of various contexts (formal and informal, business and social, etc.) and various people (from many age, educational, socioeconomic, ethnic groups).

j. are capable of initiating relationships, of deepening, and of terminating them appropriately - can handle the beginning of relationships (meeting and getting to know others), the development of intimacy (forming interdependent, lasting, closeknit friendships), and the distancing process (when loosening or breaking off ties with others).

The abovementioned competencies are applicable to all relationships. Their development is at the core of all comprehensive communication training programs. They also provide a framework for creating diagnostic tools to assess an

individual's strengths and weaknesses in interaction and for evaluating the efficacy of a completed communication program.

III

The next issue to consider in identifying what people need to know in order to enhance their ability to negotiate relationships through periods of change is: "What communication skills and instructional strategies are uniquely appropriate to this process?" To focus in on this particular context for communication training, we must first examine the nature of the people seeking training and be sensitive to the point at which they contact it.

People seeking guidance for dealing with intimate relationships have an orientation that differs from those in communication classes for other reasons. They bring a personal history and a current level of involvement that has distinct implications for what is to occur.

They, at some time in the past, met and were attracted to their partners. They found ways to continue interacting that grew in frequency and in levels of personal investment. Very positive, loving feelings grew between them that were so appealing they developed ties, agreements, arrangements, or forms for their relationship that held promise of perpetuating those good feelings. Assumptions about what the nature of these forms will be internalized early in a person's life and are sanctified in society by labels (such as marriage) that carry many behavioral and emotional expectations (e.g. consistent loyalty and love).

Intimate relationships require that many life circumstances and resources, such as living space, daily time, funds and material possessions, relationships with others, etc. are shared by the people involved. Underlying all transactions or choices made in regard to these elements are deeply felt attitudes and values about them. They also are affected by past habitual behaviors. In order to assume the smooth flow of all these interactions,

there must be much pre-existing harmony in these areas, as well as adaptation or accommodation of each to the other going on continuously as they interact. Such modifications usually are seen as quite minor and worthwhile for the larger rewards they obtain. This especially is true if they are acknowledged and appreciated, and if there is reciprocity or balance of "sacrifice" among the partners. A relationship is experienced as satisfactory or "compatible" as long as both individuals are similarly oriented, and/or they complement each other and the differences between them are perceived with empathy, positive regard, and as contributing to one another's well-being.

Under such conditions the intimate relationship deepens to the extent that it becomes the foundation upon which the remaining elements of one's life are built. Nena O'Neill (12)* proposes that the core of an intimate relationship rests on five central pillars:

a. Primariness of each partner to the other, each being the others most important person.

b. Intimacy, not only physical intimacy, but the way we open and reveal ourselves to the other person.

c. Connections and the network of family, the ties created by a relationship to other people, past and future.

d. Continuity in time - the sense of building a history together over a span of time; and the way we come in time to know one another so deeply.

e. Responsibility to the commitments made - to the partner, to ourselves, and to whatever "family" is created together.

In the course of an individual's life, changes seem inevitably to occur. These can be caused by alterations in the external circumstances of life (e.g. graduation, loss of job, moving) or by the processes of inner development that occur in the adult life cycle, causing new needs to emerge as years

*See references at end of paper.

go or (e.g. a desire for more freedom or intimacy). These changes exert pressure on the established arrangements between the partners. The old set-up can be modified if the alterations are experienced as appealing, as still meeting the needs of both partners. If they are appropriate to one, but leave the other feeling frustrated, that person will press for change back to the old state of affairs or to yet a new set of arrangements. During this period, the state of "compatibility" has shifted to a state of "strain."

The state of strain within an intimate relationship is unstable. Inner energy becomes available to resolve it. People so deeply involved with one another are more likely to experience that strain as particularly troublesome, as painful. Their preexisting ties combine to maintain their contact, to continue to live out old patterns even if they currently are unsatisfying. Yet, since the state of strain also consistently presses upon them, some sort of reaction seems necessary to cope with the daily inner distress. The consequences of unrelieved strain are numerous. They include conflict between the partners; new alignments with third parties; distancing, alienation, or coldness between the partners; fantasies in which other circumstances seem much more attractive; slackening off of effort invested in shared activities; and blaming of or hostility toward one another, and/or the stifling of such feelings with resulting numbness and boredom. These reactions simply exascerbate their feelings of dissatisfaction. If they persist, yet another response arises, one that stimulated the development of this paper: a renewed interest in expert advice, in a learning of therapeutic experience dealing with troubled relationships, a search for means heretofore not used between them to take a fresh perspective on their difficulties.

The partners often find themselves at a point of choice. It is between negotiating or talking through their different reactions to a <u>new</u> set of arrangements that each feel are more satisfying than any set up they can

create by themselves, or splitting up to go it alone or to find new partners.

People encountering communication training at such a juncture bring distinct characteristics to their experience. On the one hand, their actual, demanding predicament renders them highly motivated to learn. On the other hand, the patterns that must be altered are deeply embedded in their existing life circumstances.

To explore these characteristics, let us review O'Neill's characterization of an intimate relationship. As primary partners, they have interwoven their lives around each other. Thus, each is likely to have come to manifest characteristic, habitual approaches to everyday life situations. They each can easily become "specialized" in the sense of nurturing specific traits in themselves (such as firmness or orderliness) and looking to the other for complementary traits (such as tenderness or spontaneity). Whatever patterns evolve in this way often are reinforced every day and thus become incorporated deep into each person's ego or self-concept, so that each comes to identify with them (e.g. "I am a firm and orderly person; I am not tender or spontaneous: he/she is."). Hence, instruction encouraging flexibility or being open to negotiating new arrangements may seem to demand awkward, "out of character" responses and may be met with resistance or a sense of hopelessness. As intimate partners, they "know" each other very well - yielding a pseudo-intimacy based on having seen a certain response and being affected by it so often that it overshadows unfulfilled potentials - another factor maintaining stability, making change seem dubious. As members of a social network, existing in relationship in continuity over time, being responsible for carrying out commitments relevant to a material and social and family life-style, they have established a complex, multi-faceted life-style system which is held together by old agreements between themselves and with others - all of which are stabilizing influences, weighing heavily on the side of "maintenance" rather than change or growth.

These factors inherent in the conditions existing as one or both members of an intimate relationship approach communication training, have given rise to a number of creative efforts to adapt such training specifically to them.

IV

The complexities and rigidities inherent in an intimate relationship seem to require an equivalently complex and forceful approach to instruction, if that approach is to be effective. Consequently, an overview of the systems that have evolved to meet this demand reveals the presence of two elements rarely found in most domains of communication education. The first is that they are multi-faceted. Interaction within the relationship is addressed from several interrelated perspectives. The second is that they require involvement. Meaningful learning cannot be achieved passively, simply by reading, writing, discussing, and test-taking. Instructor and students must be experientially involved in the learning events; feeling, thinking, and trying out the material they are exploring in ways that are experienced as risky.

To elaborate on how these processes actually are implemented in communication training for people experiencing life changes, I will review the facets of content which such training can include and the kinds of methods used to involve people experientially in it. In other words, I will consider what such training covers and how it is executed.

The content dimension can be subdivided into five categories. These are not necessarily mutually exclusive but they do serve to circumscribe nearly all approaches currently being used. The five categories, to be discussed in turn, are 1) cognitive, 2) affective, 3) behavioral, 4) self-concept, and 5) system-concepts.

1. A person in an intimate relationship experiencing a life change is feeling a yearning for movement in a new direction. Hence, he or she works

with the partner to accommodate the new direction into the relationship system This process can be facilitated if each is equipped with cognitive knowledge relevant to understanding their interaction. An instructional program that is to be of use to them in this way might include some of the following material:

a. A summary of the adult life stages that thus far have been identified in the literature as being relatively common and predictable (see Baile paper) - When such passages occur, people experiencing them (and their partners, as well), unless they are informed and prepared for them, often feel angry, guilty, betrayed, confused, or victimized. They see themselves as having been singled out to cope with forces beyond their control. The awareness that these changes are likely to occur and that they are widespread can be quite helpful in minimizing the sense that what is occuring is "wrong" and must be "corrected."

b. A review of the current social patterns that are supportive, even encouraging, of many passage forms, and perhaps discouraging to others (see Snider paper) - a couple's life is influenced by the cultural and social groups with whom they interact. In every era and in every cultural context prevailing norms tend to reinforce or support certain kinds of behavior and render others "abnormal," less acceptable, and thus less likely to occur. These norms are often taken for granted, remain out-of-consciousness, and thus need to be discussed and examined for their impact on everyday behavior.

c. The process of meta-communication (17), talking about how members of an intimate couple can examine how they interact, must be introduced.

People usually attribute their difficulties to what they believe about or how they carry out the tasks of their daily life. They need to understand, as well, that it is not just the content, but the process of how they negotiate their differences that affects their relationship. They need to develop a category system, a shared vocabularly for identifying these processes. The great strength of the Transactional Analysis system (4) is the simple, useful set of terms it introduces for this purpose.

d. Under the heading of meta-communication, couples need to learn how to identify dysfunctional (sometimes termed "pathological") processes that commonly lead to (or are signs of) the disintegration or termination of intimacy (see Frey paper). Without this knowledge of trouble signs or danger signals, relationships can progress downhill past the "point of no return" before the participants are aware of the extent or significance of their predicament.

e. Another facet of meta-communication is knowing a series of steps that comprise a potentially satisfying problem-solving process. This includes the ability to recognize and articulate what point in that process their interaction is in, what point is being overlooked or passed over without full resolution, and how well they are addressing each point. Perhaps the foundation step, upon which all the rest is built, is the first - defining the problem. Nathan Hurvitz (7) emphasizes how critical it is that partners have a common definition of the situation in which their interaction occurs and the behavior causing their differences to become conflicts. He focuses on the hypotheses each party offers to explain the other's behavior and distinguishes between those that render the situation hopeless (terminal) and those that can, with effort, be ameliorated (instrumental). (See Appendix to this paper for further elaboration of terminal and

and instrumental hypotheses).

f. Additionally, some of the principles of role theory have been applied in training couples to communicate more effectively. The lives of an intimate dyad are very intertwined; they each have pragmatic roles to fulfill in carrying out daily task responsibilities. It is important that they be wary of at least two fundamental problems that often arise in the definition and implementation of role relationships. These are "role ambiguity," wherein the expectations both have of themselves and of the other are unspecified, unclear, or unexpressed, and "role conflict," wherein their expectations are not in accord with each other or each has role responsibilities vis-a-vis others not in the dyad that take so much time, energy, or resources that an insufficient amount is available for fulfilling the needs of the dyad partner.

g. Finally, some of the concepts underlying a mode of relating that transcends a role-based contact can profitably be explored. These might be epitomized in the I-Thou framework of Martin Buber. Here the view of another person as someone who fulfills specified functions, who is useful (I-It) is distinguished from one in which the essential worth, the uniqueness, the existence of that person is viewed as being as significant as one's own.

II. Partners in a stable, lasting relationship have established patterns of living that often are based on years of accommodating to one another's needs. The adjustments however minor, can be accompanied by some slight feelings of annoyance, which are repressed on the assumption that they will yield a pay-off in the form of commitment of the other to the arrangements that ensue. When a life change occurs that threatens to disrupt those arrangements, the

stored up feelings of "noble sacrifice" can turn into a sense of being disappointed or even cheated and feelings of indignation, hurt, anger, grief can arise. Reactions at an emotional level, such as these, also need to be considered in a program of communication education. This has been done in the following ways:

a. The first step often is recognition of the existence of the emotional component and of its manifestations as disagreements are aired. People often find themselves experiencing strong emotions while they are arguing over how to handle a situation The stimulus to which they are reacting can shift from the ostensible content issue to the emotional energy behind it. Thus, they are trying to relieve their own or the other's hurt, quell the anger, or assuage the fears they sense without consciously being aware that that is their intent or without explicitly stating it. They need to gain greater ability at sensing such a rise in emotionality as it occurs and at labeling it as such. Virginia Satir (15) expresses this need colorfully in Appendix B.

b. The second step in dealing with the affective domain when negotiating a life change is the expression of those emotions. It is widely agreed that withheld feelings result in confused communication and in the buildup of inner tension. The release of feelings, however, can be so volatile that many people feel safer and wiser holding them in. Because of their unpredictable impact and the common resistance to expressing them, many systems have been devised for permitting, even stimulating, safe emotional catharsis. These systems vary in how the expression of feeling is facilitated and in what context it occurs. A complete accounting is impossible here. The methods range from using body release approaches such as stretching the body, pounding a soft object, screaming, physical combat (e.g.

arm wrestling, pushing, breaking through a barrier) to using dramatic approaches such as acting out an emotionally arousing scene, playing the emotional alter ego of a character in such a scene, or giving an emotionally-charged monologue/soliloquy. These methods are sometimes practiced in the safe confines of a workshop group among strangers and sometimes with the other partner present. George Bach (2) has developed an interesting intermediate step, called "hostility rituals," which permit emotional discharge in the midst of everyday life that is detached from the actual productive dialogue between partners (see appendix C).

III. Patterns of interaction that have as long a history behind them as those between intimate couples are hard to change. Each is accustomed to respond to the other in ways that can become habitual. If these modes are insufficient to meet the demands of a situation in which life changes must be negotiated, then new styles of responding to each other must be taught. Much attention has been given recently to specifying what participants in intimate relationships who interact effectively actually do when they talk. The following behaviors emerge most commonly:

a. The first step seems to be voicing unmet needs in a way that is clear and unequivocal and yet does not immediately put the other on the defensive. This approach to expressing such desires is often called assertiveness training. (16) It emphasizes "owning" one's reactions (rather than blaming the other) and specifying the stimulus that triggers them. It often takes much practice to avoid the two extremes in this mode:

1) being too passive or wishy-washy about stating a viewpoint, and thereby having its significance minimized, and 2) being too aggressive, domineering, or pushy in stating it, thereby leading the other to see

it as a demand that implies his or her needs are to be ignored or overridden.

b. The second step usually is developing empathic listening skills. (5) This enhances each partner's ability to genuinely understand the other's viewpoint in a way that is non-judgmental. It also has been called "active listening" and "the receiver role." It involves skills such as noticing the others' unvoiced state of being upset, inviting the other to say what is on his or her mind, giving the other sufficient time to get it all out, providing acknowledgement responses (such as nods, a smile, "I see," "uh huh,") as the other is speaking, and then paraphrasing both the feelings and content in the message in one's own words to check out how accurately it was received.

c. Another important step is the setting of goals for change. (9) The focus of this kind of behavioral training is on specifying the actions that will be taken by each individual subsequent to the negotiation session, on being sure that the goals set represent realistic steps that actually can be achieved, and on planning a way and a time to check on how well the goals are actually being realized. These precautions are borrowed from the behaviorist approach to developing objectives for educational and social change programs.

d. The final aspect of behavioral training focuses on the provision of reinforcement for desirable actions, for maintaining the kind of response one partner wants from the other. (13) This process also is called "stroking" in transactional analysis. (14) It usually involves both partners identifying what they want more of from the other and what they would view as rewarding responses when they are being accommodating to the other. They are then encouraged to follow the other's performance of the desired behaviors with a

response the other would perceive as reinforcing. The agreement to modify their behavior in this direction is termed a "contract." Fulfillment of such contract enhances the amount of positive responses in the dyad, increase the degree to which each is providing for the other's needs, and makes the couple more aware of the ability to be in control of what happens between them.

IV. As mentioned earlier, participation in a primary relationship involves each member in a interpersonal environment with inherent stability forces that have deep impact on them. One major impact is the individual's defining themselves in the ways they traditionally have behaved and been perceived in the dyad and by the network of relationships in which it is imbedded. Thus, the partners develop self-perceived limits as to their own strengths and weaknesses in interaction. These rigidified self-concepts can become obstructions to the modification mandated by life changes. They need to be loosened. The partners need to regain a sense of their own ability to grow in new directions, to open new options for behavioral flexibility. This process is facilitated in several ways:

a. A number of self-exploratory exercises have been developed to meet this need. One set is packaged under the heading of "life-planning" activities. These usually ask the participants to bring to conscious awareness their perceived self-concept via answering the question "Who Am I?" and "Who Am I Not?" The latter responses are challenged by asking them to recall instances in which they actually did manifest these attributes - thereby loosening the bonds of their "identity." They also are asked to re-conact the aspirations they have shelved as unrealistic, to identify their unused personal, material, and interpersonal resources, to recall the times their behavior was surprising or exceptional, even to themselves. In this way they reawaken their sense

that they can reconstruct their "persona" to be more suitable to the new reality imposed by the changes they must cope with.

b. Another method is to bring people who are facing similar life crises together in "support "groups." Here, each gives the others encouragement for reaching beyond preconceived boundaries that actually are only imaginary limits internalized from social or family norms. These are also called "consciousness-raising" groups, in that they serve to make participants more consciously aware of how artificial and unnecessary their self-imposed limits are.

V. Closely allied to self-concept altering approaches are those intended to heighten partners awareness of how their relationship creates a "system" within which their interaction is restricted. They remind individuals that relationships have "homeostatic mechanisms" which act as thermostats that trigger reactions to maintain an equilibrium among its members. When a relationship forms, "rules" come into being which regulate the "transactions" among them. When one seeks to change, the other is stimulated to respond in a way that then affects the changer, and soon, setting in motion a "circular pattern" which renders a linear cause-effect process meaningless. These patterns can be very upsetting and confusing, unless those that are dysfunctional are identified and altered. This approach to training focuses on a host of significant patterns; some of which are briefly described below:

a. One pattern identified by Gerald Zuk (19) is "silencing strategies." These are designed to punish an individual for some transgression of the "rules" by isolating him or her in silence. The individual may conform and return to the others' good graces. Or, he may rebel and withdraw or resort to "babbling" (talking only superficially or or meaninglessly). In either case, the silenced one is seen as stubborn or spiteful. He himself comes to sense a new kind of power in this

role. Thus, he has absorbed some of the negative feelings projected by the others and begins to use his new stance as a weapon against them. The process then becomes circular and debilitating.

b. Another process often cited is "scapegoating." One person is identified as the causal agent of whatever problems exist. The other denies responsibility for that person's behavior and expresses the wish that the focal person "get better." Actually, the accuser finds some satisfaction in the process of blaming and tends to resist any direction that promises to undermine the status quo. No change can occur unless everyone assumes some responsibility and recognizes the payoffs inherent in their current definition of the problem.

c. There are many other forms of such system patterns. Examples include the "double-bind" (receiving two simultaneous messages - one denying the other) identified by Bateson (3) "pseudo-mutuality" (overwhelming emphasis on fitting together at the expense of self-differentiation) described by Wynne, (18) and "schism" developed by Lidz et.al (10) (chronic undercutting of one member by the other). Since these require close scrutiny of individual relationships, they are more useful in a therapy transaction than in a classroom. The five major aspects of communication training cited above all are potential ingredients in a program intended to assist adults to carry out the interactions between them needed for their relationship to survive through a period of change. Instructors of such programs, within the limits of their time, resources, and competence, can draw upon those which seem most appropriate in each instance.

V

The last fundamental consideration in designing a communication training program that we will consider is the mode or form it might take - how it will

be carried out. There are several decisions to be made in this regard.

The first is now the learning is to be transferred or imparted from the leader to the participants. The available range extends from being entirely didactic, and providing prepared lectures about the material to be covered, to being essentially non-directive, and simply reflecting back to the participants perceptions of what they are doing as they themselves grapple with the issues. Each of these extremes has shortcomings due to the nature of the processes being addressed.

The deeply personal, emotional investment in the longevity of an intimate relationship makes a passive learning experience, as in listening to or reading prepared material, a practical but impotent vehicle for meaningful change. The therapist-client mode of working with these issues adds forcefulness, active involvement, and adaptation to individual differences, but also is expensive in terms of the leader's time and tainted with the aura of the "medical model" (i.e. the relationship ostensibly is "sick" and in need of a "cure" from a "healer").

In between, there are a variety of methods that are nearly as efficient as a lecture and nearly as active and individualized as therapy, those which fall in the realm of "experiential education." There are several models that fit under this heading. One is a class in which individuals enroll, each of whom is a member of an outside intimate dyad, in order to enhance the awareness and skills they can bring to bear upon their back home relationships. This mode has the advantage of freeing them from the "homeostatic mechanisms" of their dyad system. Its disadvantage is the imbalance created when one member of a dyad grows and changes, while the other remains set in old patterns. A second option is a class made up of several couples. This is more difficult to arrange in most educational settings, but it is potentially more fruitful. It offers a number of advantages, due to the fact that several additional

mechanisms for change become available. H. Peter Laqueur (8) uses a multi-family approach for the following reasons:

a. Couples commonly experiencing problems can operate as therapeutic agents for each other, without one having to be perceived as "well" and the other as "sick" - they all are admitting to difficulties, thereby making them easier to face without embarrassment.

b. Initially, there often is a sense of competition among them, thereby speeding up the change process. Later, cooperation replaces competition as the facilitating agent.

c. The new field or arena for experiencing their interactions weakens the homeostatic forces that operate in their usual environment.

d. Group members are provided many opportunities for observing analogous conflict situations. To see that other couples have had comparable problems and somehow survive can be helpful in a supportive way. The observing couples can learn new and more successful ways of dealing with comparable problems from their peers.

e. If offers opportunities for learning through "identification." A person insecure in his or her role can feel connected with other individuals whose styles are similar to his or her own, and thus feel less unique and inadequate.

f. It provides opportunities to try out new modes of behavior and to see how other people respond to them with less resulting turbulence than such trial-and-error experimentation would evoke in their own relationship situation.

g. The less troubled twosomes can serve as models for couples with more discord in their communication patterns. In this same vein, the leader can use a new and more effective type of behavior shown by one individual or couple as a basis or focus of excitation for the

for the whole group and as a challenge for others to move ahead more realistically toward more effective handling of their situations.

Once the overall set-up of the training is established, the leader then must decide how it specifically will be carried out. At this level, several decisions must be made. These fall into the realms of 1) preparing the couples for change, 2) experimenting with or practicing changes, and 3) transferring change to out-of-group settings. We will consider each of these in turn.

1. As has been stressed, there often is much reluntance to alter the status quo among intimate partners. Consequently, a crucial first step in this process is nurturing the motivation to seek new approaches to relating and setting individualized goals to be pursued in the learning environment. This can be done in several ways:

a. One method is to videotape each couple during an interaction, have them watch themselves on the screen, and then rate what they liked best and what they liked least about themselves in the scene they observed. Then they can choose from among their observations the issues they want to start working on. The videotape procedure also is useful because it can be redone later on in the course to provide pictorial evidence that change has occurred.

b. A related method is role-switching. When people enact each other's usual role when carrying out an interaction, they also more vividly see and feel internally how they are being perceived and how they are affecting one another. This method, like the first, adds a new perspective to how individuals view a situation to which they have a habituated response, thus providing a fresh incentive to work on it.

c. A third approach to highlighting the issues upon which a couple might focus is called the Revealed Differences Method (15). Each partner receives a questionnaire that describes a common problem situation

faced by a hypothetical couple. They write independently what they consider the best response to a series of questions posed about it. Then they compare their answers and discuss each disagreement they find until they resolve the differences between them. (Incidentally, this is a good interaction to record and play back to them.) This process also serves to clarify the communication issues on which they need to work.

d. A final method is asking the couples to bring to conscious awareness the "love contracts" they carry out within them. People often have implicit assumptions about what behaviors are indicative of caring regard for another. These are elicited by completing the sentence, "If you loved me you would. . . or "When I love someone, I. . ." Once a series of these are completed, they can be compared to what actually is occurring in a couple's relationship and how congruent each person's assumptions are with what his or her partner has written.

II. After targets and motivation for change are established, the leader must develop strategies for the participants to achieve their desired outcomes. A full repertoire of methods, all discussed elsewhere in this paper, would include the processes listed below:

a. Didactic lectures or readings on communication.

b. Opportunities to observe models of exemplary approaches and examples of dysfunctional behaviors

c. Role-playing or behavioral rehearsal of new, potentially more effective methods.

d. Feedback from others about how successful the new experiments appear to be.

e. Reinforcements for continued use of the more effective methods.

III. An essential, but often neglected step, in this kind of training is transfer of new learnings from the protected environment of the class setting to the couple's everyday interaction. Two methods are often cited in the literature:

a. The first is assigning themselves "homework" tasks to carry out between class sessions. These must be couched in concrete, measurable, achievable terms. For example, a barter agreement can be arranged in which one partner agrees to change some aspect of his behavior in return for a change in the behavior of the other. Or, in one system (13) a "love day" each week is arranged in which one partner agrees to treble the number of reinforcers or strokes given the other on that day, thereby encouraging a richer exchange of warm supportive interactions.

b. Azrin and associates (1) use an effective approach to transfer of learning in their Reciprocity Counseling program. To measure the changes caused by their techniques, they ask participants to fill out a daily 10 point marital happiness scale on: household responsibilities, rearing of children, social activities, money, communication, sex, academic or occupational progress, personal independence, spouse independence, and general happiness. The very process of self-assessment on a regular basis can improve the likelihood of the group-induced changes being maintained.

VII

This paper was intended to provide a background for developing approaches to a form of communication training currently, and likely to continue to be, in much demand - one that considers the special needs of couples experiencing relationship turmoil due to one or both partners undergoing a passage in the adult life cycle. This challenge is being addressed in many forms by contemporary

authors, lecturers, workshop leaders, classroom teachers, counselors, and therapists. Hopefully, the many disparate approaches synthesized here provide ample resources for creating still new adaptations of such training in the many settings where it may yet be attempted.

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Interaction Hypotheses in Marriage Counseling

Marriage counseling is generally differentiated from other types of counseling and psychotherapy on the basis of its concern with the spouses as they interact. One of the reasons the spouses' differences become problems is that each has a different picture in his head about their interaction; that is, each has a different definition of the situation in which their interaction occurs (Thomas, 1931), and each has a different perception and interpretation of his own and the other's behavior, thoughts, and feelings. It is important for the spouses to make hypotheses about their interaction because the way a spouse behaves in a situation depends upon what the situation means to him. The counselor elicits the spouses' hypotheses by asking direct questions, even if they may appear naive to the spouses, to learn whether or not the spouses have a common definition of the situation. He asks, in marital situations which require such a procedure, "What is your difficulty; what are the problems?" The counselor follows up the spouse's reply about his own or the other's behavior, attitudes, etc., with further questions: "Why do you think you feel that way?" "Why do you think he [she] does that?" "Why do you think he [she] feels that way?" The explanations or hypotheses are usually introduced with "Because . . . ," "It seems to me . . . ," "According to her [him] . . . ," "Could it be . . ." and similar statements. These hypotheses are of two types—terminal and instrumental:

Terminal Hypotheses. These hypotheses interpret behavior, meanings or feelings so that each spouse does not understand his own and the other's behavior, meanings or feelings in their exchanges in such a way that something can be done to change the existing situation. They may or may not be "true" and they may "fit" the information available but do not offer possible plans of action that can be utilized to change the relationship, and may aggravate the spouses' situation. These hypotheses are irrelevant, non-operative, non-applicable and destructive. Such hypotheses describe, include and utilize:

Psychodynamic interpretations:

Husband: "She has an oral fixation."
Wife: "He has an unresolved Oedipus complex."

Pseudo-scientific explanations:

Husband: "She's a Scorpio. All Scorpios act like that. It's a proven fact."
Wife: "It's my ESP. I don't know if you believe in ESP, a lot of psychologists do, I know that. I have this ESP feeling and that's how I know what he's been doing."

Psychological name-calling:

Husband: She's a latent Lesbian."
Wife: "He's mentally ill."

Assertions or accusations about one's own and/or one's spouse's inability or lack of desire to change his behavior, attitudes or values:

Husband: "I don't think there is anything wrong with me and the way I see things, and if anyone is going to change it has to be her."
Wife: "He says he is willing to change and he tells you he's willing to change, but I don't think he'll ever change and there is no use in trying."

Unchangeable factors outside the marriage which are responsible for the spouse's problems:

Husband: "I have a responsibility to my mother and I'm going to meet that responsibility regardless of what she thinks or anyone thinks—and if she can't accept that fact then she'd better get a divorce now."
Wife: "He complains about the pressure of work and says that he has to do it and that's why he doesn't have time for the family—but he's always accepting new assignments that make more pressure. He says it has to be that way but to me it doesn't make sense."

Inappropriate generalizations about innate qualities or traits that cannot be changed.

Wife: "He's got a terrible temper—that's the way he is. When he gets like that you can't do anything with him."
Husband: "She's got a jealous nature. She gets mad when I just talk to another woman—even someone she knows I never saw before in my life."

References to unchanging religious or philosophical principles, immutable natural laws, oppressive social forces, etc.:

Husband: "The Bible says that women are inferior to men and her talk about women being the equal of men goes against the word of God."
Wife: "I won't go so far as to call it a conspiracy, but there does appear to be an organized effort on the part of most men in high places in our society to prevent women from achieving their rightful place in higher echelons of education, for instance, and that's the way he thinks too—that women are a lower type of human life."

Assertions based upon presumed laws of human nature:

Husband: "Everybody knows that if a man doesn't have sex regularly it builds up in him so he just naturally looks for an outlet."
Wife: "He was born without will

power. Anyone who drinks the way he does just doesn't have normal will power."

Allegations about intellectual limitations:

Husband: "She never could add and she can't learn how now."

Wife: "He's stupid. He doesn't know any better and he doesn't have enough sense to know it or to care."

Instrumental Hypotheses. These hypotheses explain behavior, meanings or feelings so that each spouse can understand his own and the other's behavior, meanings or feelings in their exchanges in such a way that something can be done to change the existing situation. They may or may not be "true" but they "fit" the information available and offer a basis for plans of action that can be utilized to change the relationship. These hypotheses are relevant, operative, applicable, and constructive. Such hypotheses describe, include and utilize:

Problems arising from discontinuities in communication:

Husband: "She says it's because I don't listen to what she says. I do. But we just don't understand each other. Maybe it's a question of semantics."

Changes in the spouses' relationship following situations and experiences that disturb the spouses' reciprocity:

Husband: "Things just haven't been the same since we visited her parents on our vacation last year. Something happened there that made her act different."

Wife: "He's not the same man he used to be. I think our troubles started when he got that new job. Maybe it's pressure or something."

One's own and/or one's spouse's limitations in handling situations within and out of marriage:

Husband: "I'm so tired after working all day that I just can't listen to her tell me the neighborhood gossip when I get home. I guess I just don't have the patience to listen to the nonsense she has to report to me."

Wife: "He has no idea of what a little child can be expected to do—he expects too much—and then he's upset."

One's own and/or one's spouse's habitual behavior, attitudes and values learned in growing-up experiences:

Wife: "His mother never taught him to pick up after himself and so he just leaves his clothes around and expects me to clean up after him. When I tell him to pick up his clothes he says I'm complaining."

Husband: "Her mother had trouble with her father so she taught my wife that all men want only one thing. No wonder she's frigid."

Problems due to the spouses' self-feelings associated with known life experiences:

Husband: "My trouble is that sometimes I feel so inadequate—like I'm faking everything. I know that at work they'll discover I'm faking and fire me."

Wife: "The reason is that I have a guilt complex. Sometimes I try to tell myself I didn't really do wrong. But I can't fool myself. Most of the time I feel I don't deserve to live."

Unknown and undefinable elements in the spouses' interaction which are too transient to grasp

when they occur but whose significance is understood by the spouses:
Husband: "I don't know what it is but she gets these blue or moody spells and she just can't get her work done. When she gets depressed that way I feel superfluous and stay out of her way."
Wife: "Every few months or so he gets a feeling that he has to have a drink. I don't know why he feels like that but I'm always afraid it's going to turn into a drunken siege."

• • •

When the spouses come to the counselor he reviews their situation with them and points out to them how their role performances and role expectations are not complementary, how each imputes a different meaning to the same behavior and therefore has different feelings, how each one, behaving on the basis of his value system, evaluates the other from a different perspective, and how each one, in attempting to maintain and enhance his own self-esteem may do so at the expense of the other. Specifically he may point out how each one wanted the other because of the same qualities for which he now deprecates him, how each one constrains the other so he cannot function differently, how each one provokes the other to behave so he can reject him, how each uses the other as a scapegoat for his own shortcomings, and how each one gains in some way from the very behavior he complains about in the other. He shows the spouses how they are involved in several different binds or vicious circles wherein the behavior, its meanings and their feelings are contingent upon and influence the other's, and wherein their characteristic interaction compels them to interact in ways they not only cannot change, but cannot even perceive; and their own efforts to modify their situation inevitably precipitate conflict which exacerbates the problems they want to solve.

I could go much further into this, but the main points are that to help a human being change and grow, the reconstruction of that person takes place (1) in the area of communication, (2) in the area of belief about being able to grow, and (3) in the area of restoring the use of the senses. Here is one way of looking at it: If the faucet is running, I don't put my finger under the water tap to stop it; I look for the handle to turn it off. It is quite possible that the handle can be ten feet away from where the water is running out and I may have to run to find where to turn it off; but there *are* people who try to keep the water from running by putting their hand under the water tap. The evidence of what is happening is not the same as the thing that makes it happen. The causes of most things that happen in human beings are unseen. When I hit you with my fist, you see my fist; but what determines why my fist bops you on your head is not my fist but something in me. Anybody who strikes out like this feels he has nothing in himself, and he is trying bravely to live. So where do I begin, where do I go? To the self-worth.

When I was small, I lived on a farm in northern Wisconsin. On that farm was a great big black pot about three feet high which stood on three legs. It was a very handsome pot, big enough to hold a 300-pound pig for scraping. In the spring my mother made her own *soap* in the pot from wood ashes and the other ingredients it takes to make soap. My father had a lot of land, and in the summer, when a large crew of men came to help thresh and harvest, my mother would make stew or *soup* in that pot. Then in the fall my father would gather his favorite *fertilizer* in the pot so it could mature over the winter for my mother's bedding plants, before it was time once more to use the pot for making soap. Over time our family came to call it the "3-S Pot." These were the chief regularly scheduled things the pot was used for. Of course, there was time between one and the next for other uses, but there were always two questions you had to ask about that pot to find out if you could use it or whether you wanted to put your energy into cleaning it out: "What is it full of?" and "How full is it?" The dialogue in our house about that pot was very colorful, and word combinations with "empty" and "full" were quite common. Soap was "high pot" and fertilizer was "low pot."

APPENDIX B

Later on I was working with a family, and they talked about their feelings about themselves, their insides, the feelings of emptiness, or of being full of things they did not like. This experience from the past popped into my head. When I told them the story about the pot, it seemed to say something to them. Thus, the pot concept was born. The pot concept refers to how you feel about yourself, your self-worth. In France when there is trouble they say, *"Cherchez la femme,"* "Look for the woman." I say when there is trouble, *"Cherchez le pot,"* because that is where you are going to find the problems.

It is a common thing for people, as they go from morning till night through the vicissitudes of the day, to feel tired, to feel hungry, to feel disgusted, to feel frustrated. These are common human experiences. At some point you might say your pot feels kind of empty, or it feels full of frustration or want. However suppose you have a rule to the effect that if your pot is full of something negative, you cannot say so. This is where the trouble begins. You believe it is bad to have that feeling and you have a rule against it, so you have to act as though what you feel is something else. Let us say I am feeling angry, but I have a rule that I should never be angry. My pot is full of fury. My rule in my head says, "Don't be angry," and now I have the worst type of pot you can imagine. Here I am, full, and it doesn't matter what I am full of except that whatever it is, it is something that I tell myself is bad, and I want to get it out of me. At this point I have "low pot," and I am in no condition to make reality decisions, in no condition to love or to be loved.

One of the things which is most important to me about the congruent response is that people are freed of any rule decreeing that some feeling they may have is not a human feeling. They are freed so that the organism can function fully and they can go on to make all kinds of choices about what to do.

Sometimes people double-rule themselves. They have a rule against being angry, we shall say, and then they have a rule against having that kind of rule. The situation looks like this: I should not have the rule, so there is something wrong with me because I have the rule. People like that feel angry and say, "I shouldn't feel angry," and then they say, "I ought not to feel that I shouldn't feel angry!" This puts them in the position of tightening a rope around their waist and another rope around their throat. Just let them try to breathe! This is a very "low pot" condition.